

AMHERST REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
MINUTES
November 16, 2010

LOCATION: First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall

MEMBERS PRESENT: John Coull, Lawrence Kelley, Margaret Roberts, Jeanne Traester.

OTHERS PRESENT: L. Michael Alpert, Joan Burgess, David Bryne, John Fox, Elissa Rubinstein, Walter Wolnik, Nancy Buffone [UMass]

STAFF PRESENT: Jonathan Tucker (Planning Director).

Mr. Coull called the meeting to order at 7:31 p.m.

Announcements

Mr. Coull noted that the Development Modification amendment had failed at the Fall Town Meeting, but that would not affect the ARA's work. The Gateway project would need its own separate zoning amendment(s).

Executive Session – None.

Minutes

After discussion, Mr. Kelley moved approval of the minutes of September 29. Mrs. Roberts seconded and the motion passed unanimously (4-0).

Mrs. Roberts noted some amendments to be made in the minutes of October 27. She moved acceptance of those minutes as amended. Mr. Kelley seconded and the motion passed unanimously (4-0).

Old Business

Mr. Tucker referred the ARA to information on the West End Revitalization District project in the Borough of State College, Pennsylvania. Mr. Coull noted the differences in the scale of universities (Penn State is much larger than UMass/Amherst), but said that the issues covered were the same.

Mrs. Roberts said she had read the entire report in detail online, and thought that the consultant (Delta Development Group) had done a great job addressing community needs. The goals were the same as Amherst's. She said the report was a very good source of information.

Mr. Coull said that, as with other communities, Amherst already has what they are trying to create—a functioning downtown, public green spaces, and so forth. He noted that the report addressed issues like traffic routing, including bicycle traffic, and recommended the use of roundabouts. He said the latter was an example of how design could affect behavior.

Mr. Tucker noted that the study area had washed over into a portion of the Penn State campus.

Mrs. Roberts said it would be interesting to find out how far along they were in implementing the plan. She said the report demonstrated how critical it was to select a good consultant. Mr. Coull asked whether the RFP

was out yet. Mr. Tucker said it was being reviewed by the Town's consultants for conformance with state procurement regulations.

Mrs. Roberts noted that the report stressed the need for a mix of housing.

New Business

Mr. Coull asked about meeting with UMass Housing officials.

Ms. Buffone said that the new director, Eddie Hull, could attend the ARA's December 9 meeting. She said UMass was looking at dates for a site visit to North Apartments.

Ms. Traester said that perhaps graduate students and student families could be relocated from Lincoln Apartments to new housing in the Gateway. She and Mrs. Roberts agreed that those needing housing included new incoming faculty, new campus administrators, and post-doctoral students.

It was agreed that a comprehensive picture of campus housing needs would be helpful.

Public Questions & Comment

Mr. Wolnik recommended the Select Board's practice of posting its meeting documents on the website. Mr. Tucker replied that such documents could be posted after a meeting, but it was more difficult to do so in advance, since materials were often being developed right up to the date of the meeting.

Mr. Coull suggested that some ARA funding could be used to underwrite Planning staff positions to do that work.

Joan Burgess acknowledged that the Authority had been making progress on catching up with past minutes.

L. Michael Alpert asked if there were consultants available to do the kind of work involved with the Gateway visioning process. Mr. Tucker said there were.

Sy Friedman said that Penn State was much bigger than UMass/Amherst, and had nearly 60,000 students. He questioned whether on that basis the West End Revitalization report had any application to Amherst.

Mr. Coull responded that the Authority was not looking for identical communities, but for good ideas, regardless of the comparisons with Amherst. Mrs. Roberts said that good ideas could be found everywhere. She cited the example of transitional buffer housing in Hanover, NH, a community very different from Amherst. Ms. Traester agreed, saying the Authority was learning something from each community it examined. Mrs. Roberts said that the issues were often very much the same, regardless of the community.

Mr. Fox asked about the status of the RFP. Mr. Tucker repeated that it was being examined by the procurement consultants, who had questions about the consultant selection criteria.

Mr. Fox said that the consistent message from the communities examined to date has been that mixed housing really meant minimizing undergraduate student housing. Mr. Coull said that the Authority was not going to try to define “mixed housing” in advance of the visioning process—the final product should be a mix that works.

Mr. Tucker read the following from the vision statement of the West End Revitalization report, which seemed to indicate a broader purpose:

“It [the West End] will be the place where Penn State University and the local community can integrate to create a vibrant, diverse neighborhood of students, families, and retail and professional businesses.”

An unidentified citizen said that she used to serve on the graduate council for UMass which had identified a strong need for affordable housing. She said she hoped there would be an open discussion on the question.

The visioning process was described.

Next Meetings

The next meetings were set for December 9 and 16, and January 6 and 18, 2011.

Mr. Coull noted that he would be away for the month of January.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:26 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Laurence Kelley, Clerk

Approved:

John Coull, ARA Chair

List of documents available at the meeting:

- Draft minutes for September 29 and October 27
- A printed excerpt from the “Borough of State College West End Revitalization Plan.”